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Chairman Hyde, Ranking Member Lantos, and distinguished members of the House International Relations Committee, I am honored to appear before you today to discuss a topic that is near and dear to me --- Plan Colombia. Before I start, I need to take a moment to recognize a great American Patriot before he retires at the end of the 109th Congress. I am talking about the distinguished gentleman from Illinois, and the Chairman of this committee, my friend and mentor, Representative Henry Hyde.

Mr. Chairman, I salute you for your more than 30 years of honorable service to our nation. Since coming to the House of Representatives in 1975, you have been a champion for uplifting the lives of American families. In your current position, you have played a key role in securing our nation's borders and fighting terrorism at home and abroad. As the head of the House Judiciary Committee, you steadfastly worked to protect women, children and the unborn. All Americans are better off as a result of your service. Thank you for your past and continuing leadership on this issue with Colombia and many, many others.

NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL STRATEGY

As a school teacher and coach, and much later, as Chairman of a House Government Reform and Oversight Subcommittee dealing with drug policy, I have seen firsthand the harm and

devastation illicit drugs bring to our children and the children of other countries. Here in America, the illicit drug trade continues to kill our citizens. An average of over 21,000 Americans die annually from illicit drug use. The drug trade fuels terrorists and violent criminal gangs throughout the world. It exposes a country's weaknesses in border security. It undermines democracy, rule of law and regional stability. The illicit drug trade is a high priority, national security issue --- an issue that we must continue to deal with and defeat. The President's National Drug Control Strategy is on target and working. The Strategy set ambitious two- and five-year performance-based goals: to reduce the rate of drug use by youth and adults in the United States by 10 percent over 2 years and by 25 percent over 5 years. We exceeded the President's two year goal and are on track to reach our five-year goal. At the end of 2004, the Administration reported a 17 percent reduction in the number of young people who had used any category of drug in the last 30 days. The three national priorities the President has set in his Strategy (Stopping Use Before It Starts, Healing America's Drug Users and Disrupting The Market) are key to success in attacking this national security issue.

When we talk about our efforts in Colombia, we are talking about Disrupting The Market: Attacking the Economic Basis of the Drug Trade. Why is Colombia so important to us? It was during the mid-1990's, while I was the Chairman of the subcommittee, that Colombia surpassed both Bolivia and Peru as the major producer of cocaine. Today, Colombia produces 80 percent of the world's supply of cocaine and is the source of over 90 percent of the cocaine and 50 percent of the heroin entering our nation. The drug trade from Colombia is killing our citizens, and it is a major factor in the instability of our hemisphere. Our foreign

policies with Colombia are beginning to work. We are turning the tide on the drug trade. Our efforts are not limited to law enforcement and counterdrug successes. Colombian and U.S. counterdrug efforts have improved democracy, economic stability, overall security and respect for the rule of law and human rights in Colombia.

What has been the driving mechanism for these successes? The answer is simple: Plan Colombia, an extremely determined Colombian President, President Alvaro Uribe, the Colombian people, and committed financial support of the U.S. Congress.

COLOMBIA: THE PAST

In order to show how much has improved in Colombia, it is imperative to understand what Colombia was like. Five to six years ago, Colombia was on the verge of becoming a model for lawless, failed states. Terrorist groups such as the United Self-Defense Forces (AUC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN), as well as drug cartels, were nearly ruling the land. Although the major drug cartels had been broken up, terrorist organizations like the FARC and AUC began to take over the illicit drug trade. Some estimated that these terrorist organizations controlled between 40 to 65 percent of Colombia's territory, mostly in remote areas where the Government's presence had been weak. At that point in time, the Government of Colombia and its armed forces were lacking the necessary resources, manpower, equipment and training to engage these terrorist organizations. In addition, some in the Colombian security forces were associated with gross human rights abuses and collaboration with certain terrorist groups. To complicate matters, Colombia was in the midst of economic turmoil. The Department of State's International

Narcotics Control Strategy for 1999 stated, “As Colombia struggles to climb out of its worse economic crisis since the 1930’s, the Government of Colombia is hard pressed to commit the resources necessary to combat the powerful combined threat of drug traffickers and guerrilla elements in the drug trade.” Despite the efforts of the Government of Colombia, it is estimated that coca cultivation increased 28 percent in 1998 and another 20 percent in 1999. To put these increases into perspective, in 1999, 122,500 hectares of coca were under cultivation. The immense profits gained from this illicit crop fueled the longstanding internal conflict between the Government of Colombia and the terrorist organizations.

I have traveled to Colombia a great deal. In fact, even before I became a Congressman, I had spent time in Colombia in the late 1960’s. It was then that I first began to admire the culture and respect the strong sense of values held by those who were, in a sense, being oppressed by these terrorist groups. Later, as the Chairman of the subcommittee, I traveled back to Colombia in support of U.S. policies. Two of my trips serve as great reminders of the country’s turmoil. During the first trip, we were about 1 hour from landing in Bogotá when we received a warning message from the State Department’s diplomatic security detail. Twenty-two people had just been killed by terrorists in Colombia’s capital. Police stations had been threatened or bombed, and twelve sticks of dynamite had just been pulled from under Colombia’s Supreme Court building. During the other trip, we traveled deep into territory controlled by the FARC to talk with the people on the front lines of this war to see what help they needed from us. The helicopter pilot received an urgent message saying that we better depart as soon as possible because the FARC was in the area. In no time at all, the pilot flew the helicopter straight up in the air, into the tops of trees – he knew that the FARC

would shoot us down immediately. The helicopter shuddered and wobbled, but eventually the pilot was able to regain control and fly us smoothly to safety. During this period of time, Colombia was well on its way to becoming a narco-terrorist state.

To address his country's social, economic, security and defense concerns, former President Andres Pastrana (1998-2002) developed Plan Colombia. With aggressive backing from our Republican majority in Congress, on July 13, 2000, President Bill Clinton signed into law a comprehensive \$1.3 billion assistance package in support of President Pastrana's Plan Colombia. Plan Colombia was an integrated strategy focusing on the Colombian peace process, the economy, the counterdrug strategy, justice reform, human rights protection, democracy building and social development. Our country acknowledged that the situation in Colombia was a National Security issue that demanded our attention. We wanted to stop the flow of illegal drugs, which are killing our citizens, as well as promote peace and economic development in a country that is only three hours away by plane.

I am pleased to be here today to report that, with the aggressiveness of Colombian President Uribe and strong backing from President George W. Bush and our Congress, Plan Colombia has made measurable improvements in Colombia. In terms of counterdrugs, security and defense, economy and social issues, Colombia is a better place today.

COUNTERDRUG PROGRESS

With the arrival of President Uribe in 2002, Colombia began an aggressive eradication program for both coca and heroin. His forces, backed by U.S. support, have reduced coca

cultivation from nearly 170,000 hectares in 2001 to 114,000 hectares in 2004...a 33 percent reduction. Last year's information shows us that Colombian aerial eradication efforts sprayed more than 121,000 hectares of coca, stopping coca growers' efforts to expand the crop. The potential production of cocaine continues to decline and is now at 430 metric tons of pure cocaine from the dramatic peak of 700 metric tons estimated for 2001. President Uribe has also been successful in attacking opium poppy cultivation. His efforts have resulted in a 65 percent drop in cultivation from 2001. The estimated 4,400 hectares of opium poppy for 2003 decreased steeply to 2,100 hectares for 2004...a 52 percent reduction. There were an estimated 3.8 metric tons of potential heroin production in 2004 (down from 7.8 metric tons for 2003). More than 4,000 hectares of opium poppy were treated with herbicide in 2004 or manually eradicated. Also, President Uribe has advanced an initiative to seize farms involved in the cultivation of illicit crops, especially opium poppy. In addition, the Government of Colombia has worked closely with our Government to extradite many of the most notorious narco-terrorists. People like Nayibe Rojas Valderama (a.k.a. Sonja), Gilberto Rodriguez-Orejuela and Juvenal Ovidio Ricardo Palmera-Paneda (a.k.a. Simon Trinidad) have been taken to the United States to face our legal system and penalties. Counterdrug efforts against cocaine and heroin are working.

SECURITY AND DEFENSE PROGRESS

In the area of security and defense, Colombia has made progress with our support. First, let's look at the government forces needed for security and defense. According to the Ministry of Defense, Colombia has increased its military and police forces by over 111,000 people since 2000. The Uribe Administration expanded police presence to 158 municipalities. For the

first time in history, all 1,098 municipalities have a police presence. Also, during his Administration, the number of terrorists who have chosen to drop their arms and become part of society has increased significantly. Today, there are up to 11,000 demobilized terrorists in Colombia, and thousands more have been killed in action. Overall acts of terrorism have declined 56 percent from 2002 to 2004. Kidnappings are down 51 percent; massacre victims are down 61 percent; homicides are down 30 percent; oil pipeline attacks are down over 80 percent. President Uribe is defending his country against terrorists and making it more secure with our help.

ECONOMY AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

Colombia's economy continued to expand with GDP estimated at 4 percent in 2004. They experienced growth in the past two years higher than any levels in the past decade. The Uribe Administration reports that they created over 1.2 million jobs. U.S. sponsored initiatives to promote economic and social progress have worked. These programs include: providing assistance to farmers in drug producing areas to grow legal crops, working with private industries to create employment opportunities for people who were formerly engaged in the production of coca or heroin and providing local infrastructure construction assistance for communities that sign agreements to refrain from production of illicit crops. The U.S. Agency for International Development reported that over 60,000 hectares of alternative, legal crops had been cultivated in 2004 under Plan Colombia. These efforts have benefited 51,000 families and they are readily evident. Areas like Putumayo used to be like the wild, wild west...outlaw villages thriving off of the drug trade. Today, Putumayo has been reformed. A

lumber yard and spices plant have replaced the coca fields, and coca farmers have found legitimate work.

Social aspects of Colombia, such as education and health care, continue to improve. The Uribe Administration reports that, by the end of 2004, 1.2 million more children were in public schools and 5.9 million more people were beneficiaries of public health care. Other social areas have also improved. Colombia has made great progress with the rule of law. The Colombian Congress approved a new criminal procedure code and adversarial judicial system in 2004. With U.S. assistance, nearly 11,000 judges, attorneys and criminal investigators received training and, seven additional trial courtrooms, for a total of 35, were recently constructed. In addition, the U.S. helped Colombia establish four additional Justice and Peace Houses for a total of 35. These Houses offer access to justice and peaceful conflict resolutions and, during 2004, they handled 746,000 cases. The Colombian people now have more access to justice as we know it. Although the internal conflict in Colombia has displaced over 2 million people, the numbers have significantly fallen. From 2003 to 2004, there was a sharp decrease of 41 percent in internally displaced persons. Additionally, over 2,000 former child combatants have left terrorist organizations to transition into regular society through the Child Ex-Combatant Program. Government corruption and human rights violations have also improved. The Colombian National Police has instituted a rule of law curriculum and the military is establishing a judge-advocate general corps similar to our military. The Colombian Commission of Jurists reported that of the 2,500 human rights violations in Colombia over the past year, less than two percent were against the Colombian military.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

No one can deny that our Colombian friends, with U.S. assistance, have improved several aspects of their country. However, more still needs to be accomplished. Colombia is still the world's supplier of cocaine. A large portion of this cocaine comes to the U.S., but a large portion also goes to European countries. There are up to 11,000 demobilized terrorists and the number continues to grow as President Uribe pushes his peace talks and Colombia fights back. The narco-terrorists enjoy their wealth and prosperity, but as Colombia continues to defeat them, they will try to go to other places. Mr. Chairman, I challenge your committee and other committees with jurisdiction to look at and develop solutions to these issues. We must continue to find ways to stop those illicit drugs that are not eradicated from traveling through the transit zone to our shores. We must continue to work with our European partners to stem the flow of illicit drugs to Europe...another source of money for the terrorists. We have to work with our Colombian partners and ensure that we are doing all we can to keep the demobilized terrorists from returning to the jungle and picking up weapons again...we need to get them work, so they can join regular society. We need to work with our other friends, like Peru, in the Andean Region to ensure that the "balloon effect" for illicit drugs does not occur.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, Colombia is not the same place that I used to visit...it is better. Plan Colombia, an extremely determined Colombian President, President Uribe, the Colombian people and committed financial support of the U.S. Congress have made great progress, but there is still work to be done. We all know that Plan Colombia was designed to be a six-year plan due to expire at the end of this year. What will we do in the future? I like the comments

of President Bush when he met with President Uribe in Colombia on November 22, 2004.

After showing support for continuing Plan Colombia beyond 2005, President Bush was asked a question concerning how he was going to convince Congress to fund the Plan? President Bush responded:

Well, I thought I'd go to the Congress -- look, here's what you've got to do with the Congress. You say, first of all, it's an important issue. And the issue is whether or not we're willing to stand with a friend to help defeat narco-trafficking. Most members of Congress understand it is important to help Colombia defeat the narco-traffickers. And so the first question is whether or not there will be a consensus about the importance. I think there will be. And secondly, do we want to continue spending money on the project that's important? And the answer to that question is, only if there are results. And there have been significant results. A number of acres under cultivation are down significantly. The number of arrests are up. The number of murders is down. In other words, this man's plan is working. And there is a focused strategy. How do we know? Because our ambassador is working closely with the government. Southern Command is working closely with the government. We're very aware of not only the strategy, but the will of this government to implement the strategy. And so, to answer your question, I'm very optimistic about -- about continued funding. And I look forward to working with Congress to achieve a level that will make the plan effective.

President Bush has seen the value of Plan Colombia, and the Administration has requested that Congress continue to support Plan Colombia beyond 2005 with an additional \$463 million in Andean Counterdrug Initiative funds and \$90 million in Foreign Military Financing for Fiscal Year 2006.

Mr. Chairman, I am reporting today that Plan Colombia is working, and we have the positive results to show. As the Congress, we need to review this important program, weigh it with other high-level, national priorities of the American people and do what we can to stop the illegal flow of drugs into America and promote stability and democracy in the hemisphere we live.

Thank you for this opportunity.